Palestine and Socialist Policy

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On June 19th, 1936, a debate took place in the House of Commons. The subject was Palestine, and Mr. Lloyd George explained the origin of the Mandate in the following words. He was referring to the Balfour Declaration:

"We came to the conclusion, from information received … that it was vital we should have the sympathies of the Jewish community. … They were helpful in America and in Russia, which at that moment was just walking out and leaving us alone."

In plain words, a pact was formed during the War between British imperialism and Jewish nationalism, of which the Arabs were to be the victims. Mr. Lloyd George denied this in his speech by vague references to the fact that our troops were at that time "fighting for Arab emancipation against the Turk." How much sincerity is to be found in this statement may be judged best from the observation of Colonel Lawrence in his Seven Pillars at Wisdaw. "Of course we are fighting for an Allied victory. … The Arabs would have, in the last resort, to be sacrificed for them."

Sacrificed they were. Lawrence was probably sincere in his desire to see the Arabs freed from the Turk; but in 1919 those who alone knew why the War had been fought were to express their true aims in the Peace. In the debate to which we have already referred, Mr. Amery, a former Colonial Secretary and First Lord of the Admiralty, explained these aims in relation to Palestine:

"In defence Palestine occupies a strategic position of immense importance. It is the Clapham Junction of all the air routes between this country, Africa and Asia. It occupies an immensely important naval position in the new conditions in the Mediterranean." He then referred to the importance of Haifa in relation to oil supplies and the development of an alternative route to the Suez Canal. Others, including Commander Lacher-Lampson, reinforced this argument. Their language must surely have shocked those who still believe that mandates are "sacred trusts of civilization."

Soon after the War, Jewish immigration into Palestine began, it was heavily backed by powerful capitalist interests, which obtained valuable concessions in the Dead Sea. Arab landlords sold land to the new-comers, but the Arabs

as a whole had nothing to gain and everything to lose. A few peasants found a temporary market for their produce, while labourers found work in some of the Jewish enterprises. But the nature of things they could not last. “Buy Jewish goods” and “Employ Jewish Labour” became inevitably the slogans of Zionism. The Jewish workers and “socialists” of whom we hear so much, actually took the lead in this type of propaganda!

But whatever temporary prosperity may have come to any section of the Arab community, the net result of Zionism was plain. The country which had been their home for generations was to be handed over to a foreign race on the flimsy pretext that it had belonged to the Jews 2,000 years ago! (It would, indeed, be amazing to imagine what would happen to the world if this principle were universally applied. Modern America would be wiped out and England handed over to the Welsh.) For the Zionists there has never been any question of settling among the Arabs and living as equals. They have the intolerable arrogance of people who regard their own race as “superior,” and the Arabs hate them for the same reason that the Negro hates the White Man.

Not all Hitler’s speeches have done more to create an anti-Jewish movement than this attitude of the Zionists. In Palestine the Jews are not a persecuted minority, but the mainstay of British imperial policy. They know that their position is only tenable while the foreign ruler remains with his army of occupation. The Arab demands national independence and a democratic constitution, but this demand is consistently opposed by the Jewish organisations. They are the friends of dictatorship and foreign rule.

To crush the various attempts of the Arabs to revolt, savage measures of repression have been, and are being, used. Under emergency legislation, officially promulgated by the Government, it has been made possible to hang a man for the mere possession of fire-arms, after trial by a military court. It is hardly necessary to point out that such a charge is very easily concocted on perjured evidence. Of its application it may be observed that this measure has been rigorously applied to Arabs whilst Jewish offences have been overlooked or leniently dealt with. (Details are given with dates, etc., in Punitive Measures in Palestine, published by the Arab Centre, 17, Victoria Street, S.W.1). Damage to property is punishable by life imprisonment. The Government holds power to commandeer any premises or articles it requires, and to demolish without compensation any houses where crimes are supposed to have been committed or abetted, “the actual offender being unknown.” In Jaffa alone, 600 Arab homes have been blown up under the regulation. “Collective fines” are imposed on villages “the inhabitants of which THERE IS A REASON TO BELIEVE have committed or connived at crimes or acts of lawlessness or violence.” Concentration camps, general

searches without warrant, and censorship of posts, telegrams and publications complete the picture.

How this régime — in no respect better than Hitler's — works out in practice, may be gathered from our newspapers to some small extent. Here we can find stories of Arabs shot at sight and on suspicion by gallant Englishmen. But the worst facts are not published, though the authority for them is at least as good as that offered for most fascist atrocity stories. A petition from the villagers of Al Tirah tells of what took place there on June 4th, 1936:

"The soldiers entered the houses, collected what they could of food, clothes and furniture and set it on fire … The owners, who watched helplessly, were beaten and struck down with the butts of rifles." In the end no arms were found, in spite of threats, and the soldiers left having destroyed everything but the money of the villagers, which they took with them. In another village (Al Taibah) 150 men were rounded up and forced to march round all day. Those who became tired were beaten and the who attempted to escape were shot down. One was bludgeoned with a rifle butt as he lay wounded, and both died in hospital. Many similar cases are known of brutality and murder.

Those who know anything about British imperialism will not be surprised at such facts. Imperialism is like fascism — a system of slavery, savage and ruthless when it is at bay. But while such measures have been used against the Arabs, in only one case has a Jew been executed up to the present time. With a few exceptions they are either on the side of the Government or "plus royale que le roi." [A French phrase meaning 'more of a royalist than the king'] The chief Jewish criticisms of the Government are to the effect that it has not gone FAR ENOUGH in its repressive measures!

Our sympathy with the Jews in Germany and many other countries must not blind us, therefore, for one moment, to the reactionary character of Zionism. What is appalling from every point of view is that the leaders of the working-class in Britain are whole-heartedly supporting the "mandate" with all that it implies. With characteristic hypocrisy, the Labour Party carried UNANIMOUSLY at its Conference in 1936 a resolution supporting the Palestine Mandate "in the interests of the peace of the world." Their argument was that since "the situation of Palestine makes it a point of extreme strategic importance and, as such, an object for rival imperialist ambitions" it should remain under British control! But the existence of the Thieves' Kitchen at Geneva enabled these "internationalists" to cloak the proposal in a suitably phraseology to disguise the crude imperialism of their own policy.

No-one, however, has named the Union Jack with more enthusiasm than

Mr. McGovern, who in defiance of the declared policy of his party (the I.L.P.) has continually insulted the Arabs and demanded even harsher methods of repression against them. When McGovern visited Palestine, the speech which he proposed to broadcast was so arrogant that even the Government, which is too wise to advertise its mailed fist unnecessarily, refused to let him speak. In this undelivered speech (published later in the New Leader, with an editorial disclaimer) McGovern produced his Zionist version of the White Man's Burden. The Jew was "to bring civilization to the poor Arab" and if the Arab didn't like it "the law" (i.e. British imperialism) was to operate "in a just but stern manner." Whether the people of the country liked it or not, said Mr. McGovern, "I say, send into Palestine unlimited numbers of Jews." These Jews were to show the Arab "a higher and nobler life." Most of this speech might be described as pure Melchett, but the final flourish, with its dictatorial "I say" was worthy of Mussolini in his proclamations against "disaffected" Abyssinians.

More recently, McGovern has treated us to another fascist outburst, this time in Parliament. In Hansard of June 14th, 1938, there is a report of a debate on the colonies, when McGovern, having first sneered at the Arabs for being poor and praised the Jews for being well-to-do, tells us that among the Jews young men and women go about in "shorts," to which fact he adds: "and the minds of the Arab women are being stirred." Now it is not clear as to what particular blessing of civilization our Roman Catholic authority had in mind, but later on he says that "we ought to be sending the torch of progress into the East to inflame the minds of the Arab population in order to rouse them from their filth." Whatever may be the advantage of Jews and Jewesses in shorts, I can hardly believe that an Arab who reads those words will feel inflamed with anything but a desire to give Mr. McGovern a kick in the pants.

McGovern's speech ends with a plain declaration that he supports the Mandate and that he wishes the Colonial Secretary well — strange words for the representation of a party pledged against imperialism! And he hopes that when the present Government goes out of office he will be able to say to the Colonial Secretary: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." He does not explain how the Colonial Secretary can be the servant of anything but capitalism, or why he should wish to praise him for having served it. That, no doubt, would be too embarrassing, as it would involve explaining why Mr. McGovern is himself such a devoted servant of the system which his innocent constituents imagine he is destroying with floods of Parliamentary rhetoric.

The problem of Palestine must be faced with courageous realism. The News Chronicle (July 8th, 1938) in its report on the Evian Conference on Refugees,

reports that Colonel White, Australian Minister of Trade and Customs, who presided over one of the Committees, “stated that British stock had created the Commonwealth and people from the Home Country should preponderate while British settlers were forthcoming.” No socialist or anarchist would, I hope, endorse that view, but there is no proposal that I know of to force Australia to re-consider its attitude by landing an army of occupation and compelling the people of Australia by force to accept an immigration policy to which they are opposed.

The people of Palestine have the same right to determine their own affairs, including matters of immigration, and to decide on policies that we — yes, even Mr. McGovern — think bad policies. It may not be too late, even now, to bring the Arab and Jewish people together on the basis of an abandonment of Zionism by the Jews. If so, the first step will have been taken in a process which will drive out first the British imperialist and next the Arab feudal landlords and Jewish capitalists. But unless that step is taken SOON it will be too late, and the problem, so far as the Jews are concerned, will be to re-settle them in some part of the world where they can live at peace with their neighbours on the basis of a mutual agreement. This does not indicate either Madagascar or East Africa, where the native peoples have not been consulted and would have the same legitimate grievance as the Arabs.

What is most clear is that the acquiescence of so-called “socialists” in British imperialism can only drive the Arabs into the arms of German and Italian agents. They will see in fascism the enemy of the Jew and the socialist; in Germany and Italy they already see the enemies of England. What more is needed but a little more propaganda and financial support to convince the Arab people that the fascists are their best friends? And yet, if this happens, and the Arab world turns to Hitler and Mussolini in the false hope of salvation, the entire fault will lie with British Labour politicians who have shown that “democracy” to them is a cheap catch-word, to be used when it suits the interests of the British Empire, and laughed at the moment it is used in earnest. All the talk about the Arab leaders being reactionaries or financed by foreign agents is so much balderdash, because those who use this sort of argument know that it is worthless and insincere. What does it matter who makes a demand or why it is made or who pays the bill if that demand is just? To reject a just demand is to brand ourselves as friends of tyranny and oppression: to accept it and to work for it is not only our duty but the only policy that will expose the pretensions of our enemies. If the Arab leaders are all that McGovern and his friends would have us believe, the best way to show them up is to accept their demands at face value.